



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

UZBEKISTAN: SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY ADVOCACY NGOS (04933)

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I. SUMMARY

With support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) began conducting a one-year program in 2004 aimed at enhancing the organizing skills of democracy advocacy nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), encouraging cooperation among democracy advocacy NGOs, and establishing networks linking Uzbekistani civic activists to their counterparts in Turkey.

Restrictions on the activities of NGOs limited the amount of progress NDI was able to make in this quarter. Nevertheless, following an extensive review of civic organizations in Uzbekistan, NDI has selected 15 civic activists from two different NGOs—the Center for Women’s Leadership and the Uzbek Society of Invalids—to participate in the program.

By the end of the program, NDI expects that these activists will have developed plans for and begun primary implementation of legislative advocacy campaigns; will have developed systematic procedures for sharing information or coordinating activities; have established networks with their counterparts in Turkey; and, have engaged in significant advocacy programs with the lower house of the parliament.

II. BACKGROUND

The consolidation of power under Uzbekistan’s President Karimov has been more unyielding than in almost any other post-Soviet country. The state is highly centralized, the political arena is closed, and the media has for years been constrained by both state restrictions and self-censorship. The lack of democratic reforms, the restrictions on freedom of religion, and the strict controls of economic activities are leading a growing number of Uzbekistan’s overwhelmingly Muslim population to see extremist Islamic organizations as a better alternative to the Karimov regime. These circumstances are especially worrisome in a country of Uzbekistan’s size and geographic significance.

Tensions in the country have risen in each month since January. In March, protesters forced the government to review new laws regulating trade. In April, the government used violence to end a peaceful protest in front of the U.S. Embassy. In May, hundreds of protestors were killed by security forces in Andijon. The Karimov administration is under increasing stress due to internal divisions over the government's policies and international pressure. It may not survive for much longer.

When Uzbekistan joined the U.S.-led coalition against Al Qaeda in 2001, the government permitted U.S.-funded international organizations to operate in the country. However, in the two and half years since NDI opened its office in Tashkent, the government has limited the Institute's activities. The challenges to promoting pluralism in Uzbekistan remain daunting and include government repression, a palpable culture of fear, and the absence of real political parties. Despite these challenges, the Institute remains committed to continuing its programming. Uzbekistan is located in the heart of Central Asia and is the region's most populous country; it has the largest and most advanced military and is home to extensive mineral resource. Its influence is felt throughout and well beyond Central Asia. The importance of its relationship with the United States has kept the government from revoking NDI's registration and from refusing to issue credentials NDI's in-country representatives. It has also kept the government from interfering with the Institute's meetings with independent activists. So long as the potential for democratic progress remains, NDI intends to move forward cautiously.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

NDI's one-year program seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance the organizing skills of democracy-oriented advocacy NGOs;
- Encourage cooperation among democracy-oriented advocacy NGOs;
- Establish networks linking Uzbek civic activists to their counterparts in Turkey; and,
- Designed and entered into the execution of multi-faceted advocacy campaigns aimed at influencing the activities and priorities of the Uzbek parliament.

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Restrictions on the activities of NGOs limited the amount of progress NDI was able to make in this quarter. Nevertheless, NDI conducted an extensive review of civic organizations in Uzbekistan and in-depth interviews with civic leaders and activists. In May, NDI selected 15 civic activists from two different NGOs—the Center for Women's Leadership and the Uzbek Society of Invalids—to participate in the program. In June, NDI organized meetings with the participants to develop a training schedule.

Throughout the quarter, NDI met with the representatives of other international NGOs to discuss the program. The Counterpart Civic Advocacy Support Program has provided advocacy training for many NGOs in Uzbekistan, including the two NDI selected. To design a training program that would compliment and build upon the information the participants have already received, NDI consulted with Counterpart's leaders. After these meetings, NDI designed

training sessions that focus on elements of advocacy the participants have not already covered and is specifically geared toward promoting legislative reforms.

The initial training sessions that are planned for July and August and will be focused identifying and prioritizing issues that are important to an organizations' membership. NDI will provide instruction on facilitating communications within an organization and methods for identifying stakeholders and potential supporters. Following these sessions, the participants will be required to learn the opinions of members and stakeholders on the issues they find most critical and be prepared to discuss their conclusions during the next training session.

V. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Despite the government's increasingly restrictive policies toward the development of civil society, NDI was able to interview and assess potential participants in this program. In consultation with the leaders of the Center for Women's Leadership and the Uzbek Society for Invalids, NDI mapped out the basic framework of the program, discussed the content of the training, and develop an approximate timeline for conducting the various phases of the program.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Given the delays in initiating the program, NDI projects the following schedule of activities:¹

July – August

- Training seminars on the elements of advocacy campaigns, including issue selection, strategic planning, developing management plans, and how to effectively lobby legislative bodies;
- Production of strategic plans for conducting advocacy campaigns; and
- Hands-on, step-by-step advising on implementing advocacy campaigns.

September

- Study missions to Turkey.

October – December

- Advocacy campaign planning;
- Implementation of advocacy campaigns, including meetings with members of parliament; and
- Concluding seminar on lessons learned and goals accomplishment.

¹ NDI will seek USAID approval for an extension of any work beyond the program's current end date.